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AN ESSAY  
ON  
FAMILY PRAYER.

BY THE  
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OLD NEWTON VICARAGE, . . .  
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## ON FAMILY PRAYER.

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THE inspired aphorism—"Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come"<sup>1</sup>—beams with Divine glory and animating hope. Everything, therefore, that tends to promote godliness, tends in the same measure to increase our happiness and our usefulness—our meetness for the work of God here, and for His kingdom hereafter. That gracious dispensation, by which "God setteth the solitary in families,"<sup>2</sup> opens a wide

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm lxxviii. 6; Comp. cxlii. 9.

and most important sphere for the extension of this holy principle. Here it is that a "seed is raised up for the service of the Redeemer."<sup>1</sup> Christian families, in their enlarging circles, are, as Howe beautifully expresses it, 'Divine plantations settled by God Himself for this very end and purpose, to be nurseries of religion and godliness.'<sup>2</sup> It would appear indeed that family religion will be one of the distinguishing signs of that grand era, for which the Church is waiting with joyous expectation.—"*In the latter days—at the same time*, saith the Lord, I will be the God of *all the families* of Israel," (not only the God of the nations, but distributively, *of their families*,) "and they shall be my people."<sup>3</sup> Every means, therefore, of advancing family religion is a

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Works, v. 396; Comp. Ps. xcii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. xxx. 24; xxxi. 1.

component part of the constraining obligation—"hasting unto the coming of the day of God."<sup>1</sup> Among the means conducive to this great end, family worship must take its place. For as personal religion cannot exist or be sustained without personal prayer; so neither can we identify family religion without family prayer, or fail to number this daily privileged service as a most valuable ordinance of social godliness.

If it be asked, on what ground of obligation it stands, the reply is obvious. *It is involved in the natural order of things.* The holy ordinance of marriage was primarily appointed for the successive transmission of "a godly seed;"<sup>2</sup> yet this result cannot be obtained without an active ministration of all suitable means. Here, then, we are brought to the family altar as a

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Mal. ii. 15.

mean indispensable for the due fruitfulness of the social institution. For every such connexion forms a separate independent community, under the superintendence of one head, and governed by its own laws, where each member is bound to the body by ties so sacred and tender, that all other affinities are comparatively loose and contingent. How naturally, therefore, are we led in this sphere of family unity to meet around the throne of our heavenly Father in mutual sympathy, acknowledging our many undeserved mercies, and telling out in behalf of each other the wants, sins, trials, and weaknesses common to us all ! If the being of this society is from God, the acknowledgment of dependence upon Him in the daily service of prayer and praise is the revenue of glory justly due to His name.

Nay, even the light of nature seems to inculcate this obligation. For had not the heathen their household gods—their Lares and Penates, (alas ! that the evidence of this should be found among the professed servants of God<sup>1</sup>) to whom they paid their household worship, after their blind fashion ? And shall they be more zealous in the honour of their base idols, than we in the worship of such a God as our God ? The Jews, also, appear to have had their family sacrifices performed by the master as the priest in his own household—solemnities to which, probably, some allusion was intended in the institution of the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup> And surely the command to offer the Lamb morning and evening—doubling the offering on the sabbath<sup>3</sup>—is a significant indication of the

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxi. 19, 30 ; xxxv. 2—4 ; Jud. xviii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxii. 7, 11, 17 ; comp. Ex. xii. 21 ; Pa. cxvi. 12, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Num. xxviii. 3—10.

express will of God upon this matter. In fact, if religion be a blessing to ourselves, it must be equally so to our families; and while a due and suitable provision for their interests is a distinctive mark of our Christian profession,<sup>1</sup> this expression of care for them is clearly according to the mind of God.

But however strong may be our ground upon general principles, we cannot thoroughly establish the obligation, except upon the sure foundation of the word of God. "To the law, then, and to the testimony; for if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us."<sup>2</sup>

And here we feel our ground in no degree weakened by the inability to produce any express letter of Scripture precept. To insist

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. viii. 20.

upon the letter of Scripture as in all cases the necessary and indispensable ground of obligation, we shall lose not only this, but other important duties of the service of God, (*e. g.* the Christian sabbath, and infant baptism,) which rest upon the demonstrable spirit and substance—not upon the open letter—of Scripture. It is not requisite for the perfection of Scripture, as a rule of faith and conduct, that it should command every duty in plain words. Particulars deduced from general principles have the full authority. Inferences and conclusions legitimately drawn from Scripture are Scripture, as well as what is laid down in plain terms. No code of laws enters into every minute principle of duty. Much is left to be inferred from the acknowledged principles. Nor would it be considered becoming to royal dignity to descend to the explanation

or enforcement of every obligation, when the public declarations are supposed to expound the law with sufficient distinctness; not to say that minute positive prescript, as regards the means of grace, might often, under impracticable circumstances, have been a needless wounding to a tender conscience. The general dispensation is a more complete test of our profession; whether our coldness in the service of God will avail itself of the want of literal prescript, in order to escape from the obligation of duties manifestly implied.

After all however—admitting the want of *literal obligation*—we contend for the substance, as necessarily and fully involved *in the spirit of Scripture*. And where the substance is found, it would be most unreasonable to throw it off, on the ground that the letter was not plainly enjoined.

Does the Christian duty lately mentioned, to "provide specially for those of our own house,"<sup>1</sup> limit itself to those things necessary for the body? Can our household be provided for to the extent of the Divine requisition, where nothing is done for their souls—where there is no worship of God, no religious exercises, no holy instructions, no godly admonitions? A rich table in a godless house feeds the body; but the soul is left to starve in utter destitution. The man who cares not for his own soul, is content to see his family living in sin, and going down to hell with reckless indifference.

We would also remark, that the ordinance, as we have before hinted, is involved in our necessary worship. If there be sins more or less connected with the family as a body, ought they not to be matter of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. v. 8.

family confession ; just as we conceive national confession to be a fitting acknowledgment of national transgression ? Are there not also family wants demanding the joint supplications of the body ; family cares and difficulties, that naturally invite us to draw down the Divine blessing with the besieging force of united supplication ?<sup>1</sup> Are there no family mercies, which, as the common property of the body, seem to demand the common acknowledgment ? no family judgments to be deprecated ; when, as in a shipwreck, all should give their ready and combined help ? Just as the twisted rope is stronger than the single cords which compose it ; so we may conceive the united prayer of the household to be of stronger efficacy than the individual supplications of the several members ; always

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxxvii. 1, with Matt. xi. 12.

insisting, however, that the one should in no degree interfere with, or stand in the way of, the other.

It will add much weight to this subject to observe this scriptural obligation so uniformly illustrated by the example of "the elders, who have obtained a good report" in the sacred annals. Let us commence with the history of our father Abraham, whose family godliness honoured him with the privilege of "the friend of God."<sup>1</sup> The successive journeyings of this saintly pilgrim, though among the enemies of God, and in an unsettled state, were connected with the record—"There he builded an altar to the Lord, *and called upon the name of the Lord.*"<sup>2</sup> And can we doubt, that this was an household altar for the family service of prayer and praise; specially since we have

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xviii. 17—19.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. xii. 7, 8; xiii. 3, 4.

God's own testimony concerning him, that, if he instructed his servants in the art of war,<sup>1</sup> their *primary* training was in the fear of God?<sup>2</sup> Passing onward, we hear of the noble resolution of the great captain of Israel, declared in the solemn assembly, and when speaking in the name and authority of his God—" *As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"<sup>3</sup> This could not apply to the inward and spiritual service, which, as the exclusive work of God, was more than he could engage for his family. But it could not imply less than this; that, so far as his influence and example could go, they should maintain the constant worship of God in their houses. The history of "the man after God's own heart" furnishes an additional link in the chain of godly example. Not

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xiv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. marg. The same word as Prov. xxii. 6. Comp. also Gen. xviii. 19, *ut supra*.

<sup>3</sup> Josh. xxiv. 1, 2, 15.

the cares of royalty, nor the exulting triumph of the restoration of the ark of God, must interfere with his domestic obligation. Therefore, having dismissed the congregation of the Lord with his blessing, we read—*“Then David returned to bless his household;”*<sup>1</sup> doubtless, with his ordinary, and on this occasion his extraordinary, service of household worship: so careful was he, that the king should not make him forget the master: that he should be a living example of his own determination—*“I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.”*<sup>2</sup> In later days, if Esther fasts, her maidens fast with her.<sup>3</sup> May we not believe, that she, who was so ready to call her household to the extraordinary service, was not unmindful of the ordinary exercise? It seems more consistent with a right standard to conceive

<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. vi. 18—20.<sup>2</sup> Ps. ci. 2.<sup>3</sup> Esther iv. 14.

this act to be the strengthened and more vigorous application of the daily habit, than a sudden unconnected impulse, constrained by the present emergency. Following the scriptural, though not the chronological, order, Job is presented to us as the king and priest in his own house, offering in his *stated*—not periodical—course, sacrifices for his children;<sup>1</sup> accompanied, we cannot doubt, with solemn invocation on their behalf.

And now, arriving at the bright and glorious dispensation of the Gospel, our great Lord and Master stands before us, with the apostolic exhortation to “*consider Him*,”<sup>2</sup> in every view of His person, work, and example. His public ministry was in the face of the world, without concealment. His family life, (so far as we can gather it, rather

<sup>1</sup> Job i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. iii. 1.

from incidental truth than from minute detail,) was fraught with instruction. As the head of His household, the master of His family, continually did He instruct and catechize them in the elements of religious knowledge." Nor was this all. We have intimation of His habit of praying with them—"As He was alone praying," (the multitudes having departed,) "*His disciples were with Him.*"<sup>2</sup> This, which probably was only an instance of a regular service, seems to comprise the substance, if not the letter, of family worship, with the sanction most bounden upon all that name the name of Christ—"He that saith, he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked. As He was, so should we be in this world. A beautiful instance of conformity

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 51; xvi. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Luke ix. 18.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John ii. 6; iv. 17.

to this example meets us in the recorded history of one of His sincere proselyted followers. We know not where to turn for a more complete combination of the Christian in His personal and domestic religion, than that which describes "Cornelius as a devout man, and *one that feared God with all his house*, which gave much alms to the people, and *prayed to God alway*."<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt but this family fear of God mainly included His worship.<sup>2</sup> And, therefore, here we have what—could we see it in all the members of the professing Church—would make the Church "an eternal excellency"<sup>3</sup>—a Christian worshipping family, honouring God, and honoured by God. It was probably at the season of his family worship that he

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob swore by the fear of Isaac, that is, by the God whom Isaac feared and worshipped, Gen. xxx. 53; comp. 2 Kings 35—37,

<sup>3</sup> Isa. lx. 15.

was directed to the means of hearing the message of life and salvation, and to a more full and clear discovery of the only medium of acceptable worship.<sup>1</sup> Nor was this a single example among the early followers of Christ. The salutation given to and from Churches in the house of believers,<sup>2</sup> even when the heads of the house were absent,<sup>3</sup> seems distinctly to point to domestic, rather than to Church, assemblies. Yet surely those families would never have been dignified with so honourable a name, had they, by neglect of social prayer, excluded God from His due honour and interest in them.

We presume that the obligation of family worship is nowfully demonstrated, as grounded upon the true principles of Scripture, and the uniform exercise of those principles in

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 30; xi. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Col. iv. 15; Phillem. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xvi. 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

the godly habits of the true servants of Jehovah in every age. If the duty is not literally prescribed, we have seen that it is substantively enjoined. And if we cannot produce express command, we have the constraining influence of holy example. The master of the family under the law was responsible for the circumcising of the males in his house. He was bound to keep the Sabbath, not only in his own person, but to look to his family also.<sup>1</sup> And thus every sinner is his charge—his flock, for which—no less than the Minister for his charge and flock—he is bound to give account to God. As Jacob was answerable to Laban for the loss of every lamb,<sup>2</sup> so is the householder to his Great Master for the loss of every soul. It is as if God said of every child born in the family—of every servant brought into

<sup>1</sup> See the Fourth Commandment.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. xxxi. 39.

the household—"Look to his soul. If it perish through thy neglect, 'thy life shall be for the life of him.'"

And now, having set forth the obligation, we come next to inquire into those conjoint and connected parts, which will make this interesting service acceptable and profitable; a means of maintaining our access to our heavenly Father, and a medium of receiving His daily and fruitful blessings in our own souls and in our families.

And here we must begin with first principles, and analyze the elements of real prayer; since the rectitude of the social ordinance obviously depends upon the soundness of the individual parts here combined. *Let us commence with what we may call the doctrine of prayer.*—Prayer would by many be considered to describe the sincerity, humility, and earn-

estness of a soul that feels its wants, and desires relief. But if this were all, there would be no prayer. The soul conscious of guilt and desert would never dare to come to God—its offended, holy, unreconciled God. This would be to leap into the devouring fire. The true main principle of prayer—that which gives energy to every other—is faith. It is the eye looking to the blood of atonement, “opening a new and living way to God;” the heart trusting in the High Priest, pleading that blood before the throne of God. This brings the sinner near. “He has boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; he draws near in full assurance of faith;” nothing doubting; feeling his ground sure, his way open, his acceptance confirmed.<sup>1</sup> Thus it appears that there can be no ac-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. x. 19—22; iv. 14—16.

ceptable prayer, except as grounded upon an apprehension, more or less distinct, of the person, office, and work of Christ; and, consequently, that neither can the privilege be enjoyed, nor the duty be performed, except as the doctrine is intelligently received—"I am the way; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."<sup>1</sup>

*Flowing immediately from the doctrine is the privilege of prayer.* Prayer is not now a service of form or bondage. It is not now only a serious ordinance bound upon the conscience, to be strictly and reverently performed. It is the high and holy privilege of the enjoyment of God in childlike confidence, "crying, Abba, Father."<sup>2</sup> It is fellowship with God.<sup>3</sup> It is walking with Him, as a man with a friend. It is hiding in Him as our refuge; resting

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 6.<sup>2</sup> Gal. iv. 6, 7.<sup>3</sup> 1 John i. 3.

our cares, burdens, and sorrows upon His bosom. It is the earnest of what it will be, when "the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."<sup>1</sup> This is the real nature—the heavenly privilege—of prayer; and until *the privilege* be known and realized, *the duty* will never be acceptably or profitably wrought out.

But in order to this, something more is needed than the spiritual apprehension of the ground of prayer, though something that is always connected with it. The way is open to God. Be it so. But we are both blind and dead; we have no light to discern the way, no life to walk in it. Yet we are not left in this imperfect interest in the privilege; or rather with the mere ex-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxi. 3.

hibition of a most desirable privilege, without the capacity for its enjoyment. He who is "the way," is also "the truth, and the life."<sup>1</sup> Here is then the needful light and life dispensed through the medium of that Divine Person, so aptly and scripturally designated in our Confession of Faith, "the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life."<sup>2</sup> How suitably He performs His office and work in us is abundantly evident. For when in the exercise of His office He glorifies Christ before us,<sup>3</sup> does He not at once vividly present to us the way to God, and the light and life to walk in that way? And when convincing of sin, guiding into all truth, quickening to energy, how does He then "help our infirmities" by His teaching and grace, inspiring our desires, moulding them into a suitable frame, and

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 6.<sup>2</sup> Nicene Creed.<sup>3</sup> John xvi. 14.

clothing them with suitable expression ; so that every breath of prayer is His breathing, every framing of prayer His teaching !<sup>1</sup>

If these remarks should seem to be a digression from our immediate subject, they are not really so. The true nature of family prayer, as a social ordinance, can only be explained by reverting to the individual character of supplication. It can only be an acceptable service, when the combination is framed upon the scriptural principle of individual prayer—an habitual and unreserved acknowledgment of the glory that the Father hath put upon Christ, that all should be done in His name ;<sup>2</sup> and a simple and entire dependence upon the Divine Spirit as our inspirer, our helper, our teacher.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 26.

<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 13, 14 ; xvi. 23, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. vi. 18 ; Jude 20.

Besides, however, these component principles, which belong to individual prayer, there is an enlargement of heart in sympathy and intercession that necessarily belongs to this fellowship, and should be especially cultivated in reference to it. The line between personal and social prayer should be distinctly marked. To clothe the latter too exclusively with our own proper individuality, would be an error prejudicial to the fruitful results of the ordinance. We should labour after largeness of heart, tender fellowship in all the cares of each other. We should feel that we are not, as in secret, like Hannah,<sup>1</sup> to bear our own, but to "bear one another's, burdens,"<sup>2</sup> before the Lord, as "members of the same body." Family prayer ought to enter *into full and minute detail*, according to the circumstances of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. i. 7—18.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. vi. 2.

the different classes composing the little congregation ; children, servants ; their ages, their various temptations and besetting corruptions ; indolence, or infirmities of temper, and neglect of duty ; never forgetting to plead the promises of God suitable to each ; to remember special family wants, mercies, thanksgiving. This was the prominent characteristic of Mr. Scott's family worship ; enlarging his circle from his household to his parish ; embracing the universal church in all its diversified departments, and the world in its wide-spread darkness and misery. Need we wonder, that the fruits of this daily enlargement of faith were abundant and permanent ? extending not only to his children, but to the members of his household, occasional or settled ; so that his biographer relates this most instructive and encouraging result, ' that in very few cases has a

servant, or a young person, or, indeed, any person, passed any length of time under his roof, without appearing to be brought permanently under the influence of religious principle.’<sup>1</sup>

The responsibility of conducting this most interesting service obviously belongs to the head of the family. He must consider himself to be—what Noah, Abraham, and the Patriarchs of old were—the priest of his own household. And will not the sense of this responsibility suggest the necessity, so far as in him lies, of preparing his heart with retirement and recollection for this service, that he may be preserved from the provoking sin and imminent danger of “offering incense with strange fire before the Lord?”<sup>2</sup> The thought that he is to his family what the minister is to the

<sup>1</sup> Scott's Life, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Lev. x. 1.

congregation, brings with it many solemn; abasing, stimulating exercises. In the use of a form, no less than in extemporaneous supplication, it will be evident, whether his own affections are quickened in spiritual liveliness. If they be, will not the flame of sympathy kindle, with those, at least; that are spiritual worshippers? But any lack of liveliness—how speedily, as in the congregation, does it communicate deadness and formality! It is “offering the blind and the lame for sacrifice. Is it not evil? I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts; neither will I accept an offering at your hand.”<sup>1</sup> Let the master of the household be to the social body, what the heart is to the natural body—that which communicates vital spirit to every member.

Let me not, however, be supposed to

<sup>1</sup> Malachi i. 8—10.

limit this preparation to the family priest any more than to the Church minister. The Christian who looks for communion with his God in the family service, will first seek it in the closet. Secret prayer is the best preparation for family prayer. Without this preparation, all will be routine, formality, deadness, death. Sometimes it is to be feared, that the social service is the compensation for the neglect of the private exercise; than which nothing can more tend to give to the former the character of mockery or delusion. And indeed, who needs not the warning to take heed and beware of formality, as the canker, which eats out the heart of this, as it does of all other spiritual exercises? The awe of the Divine Majesty must ever be combined with child-like confidence.<sup>1</sup> This—this alone—is the

<sup>1</sup> Psalm v. 7.

spirit of acceptable worship.<sup>1</sup> Both those that conduct the service, and those that unite in it, have, indeed, great need to seek for increasing liveliness and spirituality. For when, as is too often the case, it is without warmth and life, little more than an acknowledgment of our dependence upon God, and our obligations to obedience, it can scarcely be called a "reasonable service." We hardly know what value to allow to it, or what good to anticipate from it. Let the ordinance manifestly exhibit the privilege of prayer. Let it also set out the deep solemnity of the service—the most solemn work in which a worm of the earth, "a man of unclean lips," can be engaged; and which must ever be regarded with self-abasing adoration of the infinite condescension, that permits and even encourages the

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 28, 29. Compare Ps. lxxxix. 7.

service. This will greatly tend to keep alive a deep sensibility of the danger connected with this exercise—a danger not belonging to the worship of heaven ; but one that grievously besets our earthly worship—a danger, however, for which not the service, but the worshipper, is responsible. It is this to which we have just been alluding, and against which we need constantly to be upon our guard—a customary, cold, heartless frame of mind during this daily service. The ear becomes accustomed to the sounds of prayer, and the heart is too easily lulled to sleep, so as to be almost unconscious of its own present employment, or its need of the blessings which it had now been asking for. A new voice, or tone, or mode of expression, may for a while rouse the ear, and resuscitate the attention ; but the spirit of slumber may still remain, the

tendency to torpor may be unshaken, and the heart as remote from the enjoyment of God, and as unfitted for spiritual communion with Him, as if no medium for the participation of these inestimable blessings existed. Is not this danger far too little dreaded—too feebly resisted? Hence the importance, as we have before hinted, of private prayer, and of making it a distinct petition in private, that “the Spirit of supplication” may be vouchsafed to all the worshippers in our social assemblies, that, by the joining of every heart in the petitions sent up to heaven, the service may be acceptable to our God, and richly fruitful in blessing to ourselves.

Nor let this danger be supposed to attach to the circumstantial or mode of our service. The disease lies far deeper than the surface. It belongs not to forms, but to the formality

of the heart. What intelligent, self-scrutinizing, Christian, but has made the discovery, that there may be formality without forms ; that the dead heart and service may be the accompaniment of the flowing tongue? No less clear is it, that there may be form without formality ; that the Spirit of supplication may be quite independent of the gift, and that " the Spirit may help our infirmities,"<sup>1</sup> and stir up our desires, and teach us to present them before our God, through the medium of a pre-conceived form.

It is not to our purpose to attempt any settlement of the long-mooted question, as to the superior advantages of composed or extemporaneous supplication. It is sufficient to prove, that the former is a scriptural and acceptable mode of worship, And when we read of a Divinely appointed form for the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 26.

service of God's ministers,<sup>1</sup> and the Psalms of David as an ordained and formal part of the worship of His temple<sup>2</sup>—when, further, we find our Divine Master ordaining a direct form of prayer,<sup>3</sup> what reasonable doubt can be entertained on this point? Indeed, the objection of Dissenters is not so much to the principle of forms, as to their liturgical prescript. Although that eminent man, Dr. Owen, seems scarcely to admit their influence, except in restraining, if not absolutely quenching, the Spirit of supplication,<sup>4</sup> (alas, for the littleness of great men!) yet his leading cotemporaries, Baxter, Howe, and

<sup>1</sup> Num. vi. 22—27. See also the form at the removal of the ark, the use of which was continued in the church by David. Num. x. 35. Ps. lxxviii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Compare, also, the set form given to the singers in the public service; 1 Chron. xvi. 7—36, with Ps. cv. xvi; 2 Chron. xxix. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xii. 2—4. Mr. Mendham has collected together various passages from the ancient Jewish prayers, which correspond with this Divine form.—Introd. to Expos. of Lord's Prayer, p. xvii.

<sup>4</sup> See his Treatise of the Work on the Holy Spirit in Prayer.

others, did not scruple to allow—nay, even to advocate—their partial use, and some even to indite them for the help and edification of the church.<sup>1</sup> Witness Baxter in his prayers—how different from Baxter in his disputations! Dr. Owen himself, though so greatly his superior in the theological arena, did not come to God with more simple, childlike, unfettered, powerful confidence. Modern Dissenters are followers of Baxter and Howe, rather than of Owen. Not to speak of Matthew Henry's valuable treatise in the next century, the last few years have produced works from two of their leading ministers, constructed for an enlarged extent of application.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baxter's *Poor Man's Family Book*, and Howe's *Sermons on Family Worship*; Works, vol. v.

<sup>2</sup> See the Works of Drs. Morison and Fletcher. The Ministers of the Kirk of Scotland sent forth a similar volume before the late lamentable disruption. 'The Book of Family Prayer,' to which this Essay was originally prefixed, differs from the volumes of Drs.

In stating so much in favour of preconceived devotion, on no account let us be conceived to throw any damp upon the suitable flow of our own natural expressions of heart before God. 'I would hate'—said good Bishop Hall—'to be guilty of pouring so much water upon the Spirit, to which I shall gladly add oil rather. No'—adds this

Morison and Fletcher, as being the combined exercise of many minds spiritually gifted in supplication. It has been found an acceptable offering to the Church. A form of family devotion was intended to be authorized at the Convocation, 1689, though the design was subsequently relinquished. 'There was reason to hope' (remarks Dean Prideaux) 'that this work might have been of very great use towards the restoring of family devotion among us, and thereby make religion flourish in the land. For families may be considered as lesser churches, of which the National one is the aggregate; and the introducing of religion into the parts seems the most effectual way of making it flourish in the whole.' (Life, p. 61.) 'We, as Dissenters,' said the late eminent Robert Hall, 'for the most part use and prefer free prayer. But God forbid we should ever imagine this the only mode of prayer which is acceptable to God. We cannot doubt that multitudes of devout persons have used forms of devotion with great and eminent advantage. To present our desires before God in reliance on the atonement of the Mediator, is the real end of prayer, and is *equally acceptable, whether it be offered with or without a preconceived form of words.*'—Works, vol. v. p. 292.

godly prelate, in the full burst of his devotional fervour—'let the full soul freely pour out itself in gracious expressions of its holy thoughts into the bosom of the Almighty. Let both the sudden flashes of our quick ejaculations, and the constant flame of our more fixed conceptions, mount up from the altar of a zealous heart unto the throne of grace. And if there be some stops or solecisms in the fervent utterance of our private wants, these are so far from being offensive, that they are the most pleasing music to the ear of that God, unto whom our prayers come. Let them be broken off with sighs and incongruities of our delivery; our good Lord is no otherwise affected to this imperfect elocution, than an indulgent parent is to the clipped and broken language of his dear son, which is more delightful to him than any other's smooth oratory.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Works, vol. x. p. 277.

Yet, setting, as we do, a high value upon the free expression of our hearts, we see no reason for underrating the manifest blessing and helpfulness of preconceived compositions; only feeling the deep importance of filling up the form with renewed life and spirit; in which case we fear not to affirm, that it may not only be a staff for the support of the weak, but a well-warranted establishment to the infirmities of the strong.<sup>1</sup> We might add, indeed, that forms, so far from quenching the Spirit of supplication, may supply a true and solid test of "praying

<sup>1</sup> 'Though,' as Fuller writes in his peculiar style of expressiveness, 'a man hath not change of raiment, and cannot appear at the court of heaven every day in a new suit, but comes in the same clothes; yet if he be a loyal subject, he shall have free access to the King of glory. If he be a child heaven-born, his Father's ears will be open to him, and his petition received and granted. But '—he adds—'while he goes to God with his old prayer, let him labour to carry with him new affections.' 'They who use prescribed and set forms of prayer pray by the Spirit, when their petitions are accompanied with fervent affections, stirred in them by the Holy Ghost.'—Bishop Hopkins, vol. I. p. 257.

in the Spirit," when, as Bishop Hopkins admirably observes, 'we are fervent in putting up those requests to God, where neither novelty, variety, nor copiousness of expressions can be suspected to move our affections, but only the genuine importance of the matter, which we pray for through prescribed words.'<sup>1</sup>

But not to dwell longer on the point of controversy, we return to the practical discussion, in suggesting a few thoughts relative to *the mode of conducting* this most valuable and interesting service. Creatures, as we all are, of sense; wanting a stimulus for the resistance of incessant and besetting hindrances in our spiritual services, everything that conduces to liveliness and maintained interest in family worship is a matter of high consideration. That it should be na-

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Hopkins, *ut supra*.

tural in its general character is very important. If forms must enter into it, the more care is needed to infuse life, to guard as much as possible against routine and uniformity. Keep distinctly in view the different ages and characters of the little congregation. Let the language be suitable to the youngest and lowest capacity in the room. We need scarcely remark upon the necessity of Scripture forming a component part of the service. The rule is express, and of universal obligation.<sup>1</sup> The Old and New Testaments will of course each find their place, thus bringing the whole word of God before the family. Whether going through the two portions of the sacred book consecutively, or taking the order of the Church, in either case we may look at the Scripture as found for us, sent of God, not of our own

<sup>1</sup> Deut. vi. 6, 7.

seeking, the manna for the day. The remembrance that this Scripture is probably, with some members of the family, the only reading for the day, marks the value of large portions read. A reference to the marginal parallels will often tend greatly to keep up the interest, and enlarge the profit. As we do not, "as the heathen, think that we are heard for our much speaking,"<sup>1</sup> the protraction of the service, so as to interfere with the active and immediate duties of the day, is obviously inexpedient. Tediousness will make that a drudgery, which ought to be "perfect freedom." Let our household find the ordinance 'short, savoury, simple, plain, tender, heavenly. Worship thus conducted,' as Mr. Cecil remarks, 'may be used as an engine of vast power in a family.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Bickersteth judiciously remarks upon this point—"Some, by a voice too loud, or too low, or from using a particular whine

Of this character was the family worship in Philip Henry's house—a daily flowing stream of blessing, by which that simplicity of godliness, which so eminently distinguished every known member of the family, was nourished with daily life. ‘He managed it,’ his biographer tells us, ‘so as to make it a pleasure, and not a task, to his children and servants. For he was seldom long, and never tedious, in the service. The variety of duties (combining singing, reading with exposition, and catechising, with prayer,) made it the more pleasant,” so that none who joined with him had any reason to say, “*Behold what a weariness is it!*”<sup>1</sup> Such an excellent faculty he had of rendering re-

or tone, or by a repulsive manner, by aiming at fine expressions, or by vulgar and coarse ones, or by excessive length, fatigue and perhaps disgust those whom they desire to edify. Let all,’ he adds, ‘be natural and simple, short and devout, and your voice such as you use in conversing with your friends on serious subjects.’—Treatise on Prayer, p. 167.

<sup>1</sup> Mal. i. 13.

ligion the most sweet and amiable thing in the world ; and so careful was he, like Jacob, *to drive as the children could go*. 'If some good people,' his son sensibly observes, 'that mean well, would do likewise, it might prevent many of those prejudices, which young people are apt to conceive against religion, when the services of it are made a toil and terror to them,'<sup>1</sup>

This view of the benefit of a well-conducted family service naturally leads to a more full consideration of the special privileges, and advantages of the ordinance. Mr. Cecil thus tersely describes its *value, as an effective means of Christian instruction*. 'It arrests every member with a morning and evening sermon in the midst of all the hurries and cares of life. It says, 'There is a God ! There is a spiritual world ! There is

<sup>1</sup> See his *Life*—a most instructive piece of family biography.

a life to come!"<sup>1</sup> Thus does the Christian household become a school of valuable improvement, when the substance of Scripture is opened, in course, "line upon line, and precept upon precept;" adding to their stock of knowledge, expounding new apprehensions of Divine truth, and reviving old and well-nigh faded impressions of former truths. Often, indeed, (as we have before remarked in the instance of Mr. Scott,) has it been acknowledged to the praise of our glorious God, that the first turn of the soul heavenward was made in a godly family, where the worship of God, combined with an unctional sense of spiritual things, gradually imbued the heart with impressions, that were never worn off to the dying day.

<sup>1</sup> Cecil's Remains. 'Depend upon it'—was the dying testimony of an eminent Christian—'there is just so much religion in a family, as there is of seriousness and reality in family prayer.' Memoir of Rev. Cornelius Neale, p. 82.

We might here also remark upon the valuable assistance to Ministerial instruction from a wider and conscientious course of family teaching. The ground would be somewhat broken up for a fruitful improvement of the public means. The appetite would be maintained. The conscience would be preserved tender. The mind would be ready for the more full development of truth. Whereas, in the want of these advantages, the minds, no less than the hearts of the uneducated, are encrusted with an almost impenetrable hardness. In the family circle, also, this daily course of instruction furnishes a wise parent or master with many valuable opportunities of indirect rebuke or counsel, when a more formal notice might be unadvised. The discreet improvement of this means is well calculated to smooth the irksome burden of subjection, and to

open the refreshing avenues of mutual confidence.

This leads us to advert to *the diffusion of sympathy* through this medium among the several members of the household. The "good and pleasant sight of family unity"<sup>1</sup> can never be fully or solidly exhibited, except upon the ground of family godliness. It is no common privilege to meet as a family with our heavenly Father, in free access to His presence and love, when each member minutely knows each other's need, and unites "with one heart and one mouth," in the holy harmony of love, commending each other to our common Father's care and blessing. By this service all the diversified providences of the family, thus commended to God, cement more strongly the mutual bond, and are graciously ordered for a prosperous issue. A new

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

comer is welcomed, and the departing member dismissed, with prayer. "The prayer of faith saves the sick."<sup>1</sup> The absent member is not forgotten:<sup>2</sup> he journeys under the special protection of Jacob's travelling God, and trusts, under the same cover, to be returned to the bosom of the endeared circle.<sup>3</sup> Important changes are overruled; perplexing difficulties directed. Blessings are doubly blessed; afflictive dispensations are sanctified. Thus, *it is not individual worshippers in the family, but a holy family worship*, which becomes a common means of grace to all. "The church in the house,"<sup>4</sup> being one in prayer, becomes in its several members the medium of imparting a blessing to the whole body. "The members have the same care one for another. Whether one

<sup>1</sup> James v. 15.<sup>2</sup> Job i. 4, 5.<sup>3</sup> Gen. xxviii. 15.<sup>4</sup> Rom. xvi. 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, this exercise is conducted in the true “Spirit of supplication,” who does not see what a large influence of cheering sympathy is spread throughout the whole household of Christian worshippers? “It is as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Israel; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.”<sup>2</sup>

And yet Christian watchfulness is essential to preserve the fragrance of this holy service. The instant transition, too often made, to levity and frivolous conversation, tends greatly to damp its unction and abiding impression. We are far from insisting upon a restrained habit, whether of speak-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

ing or of silence. But much valuable result has been frittered away and lost by a want of recollection, seriousness, and regard to the spiritual tone of conduct.

We advert to the influence of family *worship, as a means of perpetuating religious instruction*. If we cannot convey grace to our children, we can habituate them to those exercises of Christian discipline, which are means of grace, in a large number of instances, effectual to promote their best interests. The family service carries with it a voice of conscience and conviction, even when no higher result is produced. The younger members, as they gradually succeed to household responsibility, carry with them this ordinance as a component part of the religion "received by tradition from their fathers." Thus, the acknowledgment of God, the profession of His name, a re-

cognition of Christian obligation, together with a greater or less measure of scriptural instruction, enters into the newly-formed circle ; and “ one generation shall praise the Lord’s works unto another, and declare his mighty acts.”<sup>1</sup> This was the grand reason of the ordinance of God unto His ancient people. “ He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers, that they should make them known to their children ; that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children : that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”<sup>2</sup> Who can say what is the responsibility of handing down to posterity the ungodly example, the neglect of all exter-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 5—7.

nal obligations, by which families, unless sovereign grace interpose, instead of being consecrated to the service of God, become linked to a "world that lieth in the wicked one?" We need only borrow Dr. Buchanan's striking language, to mark the present contrast between a godly and a godless family. 'How painful is it'—he remarks—'to reflect, that there should be in this kingdom many domestic societies, among whom the worship of the Deity is not known; in whose houses no grateful accents are ever heard, no exultation of heart for the Divine goodness! There are indeed accents of exultation and mirth; and 'the harp, and the viol, and the tabret, and the pipe, are in their feasts:' but there is no remembrance of God; 'they regard not the operation of his hands.'<sup>1</sup> While even in-

<sup>1</sup> Isa. v. 12.

animate nature, in a certain sense, offereth praise to the great Creator, and fulfilleth His will ; *these men* pass through life in silence, insensible to the mercies, or judgments, or power, or providence of the unseen God ; yea, more insensible than the inhabitants of heathen lands, upon whom the light of truth has never shined.'

' How different is the scene which is presented in those happy families, where the voice of prayer and thanksgiving consecrates every day ; where the word of God is devoutly read, and infants are taught to lisp their Creator's praise ! There, from day to day, domestic peace, and love, and harmony, are cherished by the sublimest motives, and strengthened by the tenderest and most powerful sanctions. On the hallowed day they repair with gladness of heart to their respective places of worship, and min-

gle with assemblies, which meet with much more delight for prayer and praise, than other assemblies for worldly mirth. And let not the world condemn or disturb their holy exercise. For we learn from Scripture, that it is from such families and assemblies, who "are the salt of the earth,"<sup>1</sup> worshipping in the midst of us, that the incense of prayer ascends *in behalf of the country*, and is accepted in heavenly places, through the intercession of the Mediator.'<sup>2</sup>

Yes, indeed; thus does our heavenly Father "create *upon every dwelling-place* of mount Zion," no less than on her more public "assemblies, a cloud and smoke *by day*, and the shining of the flaming fire *by night*"<sup>3</sup>—his gracious seal to the morning and evening sacrifice. Living as pilgrims and strangers, with our home ever in view,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Sermons, pp. 217—219

<sup>3</sup> Isa. iv. 5.

and desiring to keep moving onwards towards it, we are yet daily and hourly conscious of our need of continual supplies from above, to quicken our steps, and hold up our feet in the slippery and rugged path. Hence, while we prize the privilege of the closet, to be alone with God, we cannot but acknowledge united prayer, praise, and intercession, in our family communion, to be a delightful and desired means of grace. May we not appeal to those, who, in the true spirit of the service, taste its invigorating refreshment, whether the blessing does not abide with us throughout the day; whether they might not acknowledge the soothing of the little irritations and anxieties of the day, as the realized answer to the morning supplications? Shall we not then welcome the time of family worship, as a privileged relief in the midst of the distrac-

tions of each day's trials? And, instead of being "detained before the Lord,"<sup>1</sup> in the drudgery of formal service, we shall sensibly feel the privation of occasional, though necessary, absence. Instead of contracting the service, we shall count it more needful than our daily food or work. We shall do it in a spiritual and lively habit. We shall "draw water from it with joy as from a well of salvation,"<sup>2</sup> and be careful that all our family unite with us; not one wilfully missing from this holy service.

It need scarcely be observed, that, in this view of the privilege of the service, it will not be confined, as we fear it too often is, to the close of the sabbath. The Lord's Prayer (which, as being indited in the plural number, is evidently suitable for our family worship,) teaches us to pray for *daily* bread.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xxi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xli. 3.

And in the remembrance of our daily family sins, mercies, and blessings, what other resolution, therefore, can we take than this —“ *Every day* will I bless thee?” Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening (daily) sacrifice.”<sup>1</sup>

Nor, indeed, should we be satisfied with the *daily* standard of service. There was the morning as well as the evening sacrifice —“ two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer *in the morning*; and the other lamb thou shalt offer *at even*.”<sup>2</sup> And are we living under a more glorious dispensation; and shall our sacrifices be more straitened? “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto the name of

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxlv. 2. Ps. cxli. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. xxix. 38, 39; Num. xxviii. 3, 4.

the Most High." This is truly the worship of angels, the work and the service of heaven. But when is the fittest time for this sublime exercise? Let the psalmist continue his burst of joy—"To show forth thy loving-kindness *in the morning*, and thy faithfulness *every night*."<sup>1</sup> Shall not we then commence the day with the acknowledgment of continued and undeserved mercies,<sup>2</sup> "in the morning directing our prayer, and looking up;"<sup>3</sup> deeply conscious that "the way of a man is not in himself;"<sup>4</sup> "in all our ways acknowledging Him;" trusting to His gracious promise, that "He will direct our paths?"<sup>5</sup> Or can we omit the *evening* exercise of faith in committing ourselves to His providential keeping, in thankful remembrance of the addition of

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xcii. 1, 2, with Rev. iv. 8; vii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. v. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. x. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Lam. iii. 22, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Prov. iii. 6.

another day's mercies, and the humbling recollection of another day's sins reckoned to our great account? To begin a day without God, to enter into a world of temptation without having sought His care and protection, deprives the soul of peace, realizes no substantial enjoyment of the Divine presence and favour.<sup>1</sup> Any accident that might happen to ourselves or our family, instead of being received with peaceful resignation, as the appointed will of our heavenly Father,<sup>2</sup> would only bring with it the sting of reproach, in that we ventured into danger without the armour of our God. To *close the day* without God is, indeed, a sinful forgetfulness of the high privilege of the care of that Divine "Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth."<sup>3</sup> Our slumber is more like the insensibility

<sup>1</sup> Ps. iv. 8.<sup>2</sup> Job i. 5, 13, 21.<sup>3</sup> Ps. cxxi. 4.

of the brutes, than that "sleep, which He giveth to His beloved—" <sup>1</sup> a childlike repose in "the everlasting arms underneath us." <sup>2</sup> Better, therefore, will it be for us every way to follow the course of nature, where "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge." <sup>3</sup>

In insisting, however, so strongly upon the obligation of this service, we do not mean to bind it as absolutely, and under all circumstances, indispensable, as if the occasional omission of it was *necessarily* sinful. We would rather view it, as Mr. Cecil states it, 'as our liberty, not our task;' <sup>4</sup> and in some unavoidable hindrances we may do well to remember our gracious Master's rule of Christian liberty—"I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." <sup>5</sup> Yet let every omission

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxvii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xix. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Remains.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. ix. 13.

be a matter of plain conscience and necessity. In most cases it would be far better to shorten, than wholly to omit it ; as the excuse, once allowed for its omission, would too often furnish the plea for an unspiritual heart, where unwatchfulness or self-indulgence may have enervated the spring for the daily service. The excuse of want of time for this service is in itself so unreasonable, that only the most insensible, or those that are willing to be deluded, can be deceived by it. Whose time is so precious, that more cannot be redeemed ? One quarter of an hour in the morning, and the same in the evening, would suffice to embrace a short scriptural reading combined with worship. And where is the man of business so intently and unceasingly occupied, who does not spend far larger space in the course of each day for engagements, not perhaps un-

lawful, but unquestionably less important and obligatory than the claims of the service of God? If more time is really wanted, might it not be redeemed by early rising, increasing diligence, more careful order? If time fails for anything, should it not *first* fail for obligations of minor interest? Does not the example before alluded to, of one who, immersed in the cares of a kingdom, would not intermit his family exercises,<sup>1</sup> put to shame these frivolous excuses, and trace them to their native principle of heartless indifference? At all events, referring to the minimum of time necessary for this service, we must conceive that the man who cannot spare half an hour of each day for the service of God, can never have practically acknowledged the golden rule and promise—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. vi. 20.

things shall be added unto you.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed we might further remark, that even this small modicum of time is not *in the end* lost to the day. For the habits of order and regularity, by which this service would bring everything into its proper place and season, would far more than counterbalance the trifling loss of that time, which it seems can scarcely be afforded. So fearfully is the scriptural and true estimate of things reversed ; as if the world, not God, should have the supreme place ; thus blotting out of mind the one great end, for which man was sent into the world !

Yet to meet, as far as may be, this unworthy excuse, as well as to secure the most profitable employment of the family service, “ the wise man’s heart will discern both time and judgment.”<sup>2</sup> “ God hath made

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Ecc. viii. 5.

everything beautiful *in his season.*"<sup>1</sup> Let us follow this Divine example. "A good man will order his affairs with discretion," and "will behave himself wisely," while seeking the presence of his God, and "walking within his house with a perfect heart."<sup>2</sup> In this principle he will not postpone either service too late. Nothing is more conducive to the health and prosperity of his soul, or brings into closer communion with God, than the habit of seeking him before the distractions of the day begin, and the throng of its occupations abridges and hurries the service.<sup>3</sup> Not less important is it to perform the evening sacrifice, before the body, wearied with the anxieties and labour of the day, renders us much more fit to sleep than to pray. If the eye be asleep, the soul cannot be fully awake. To expose our

<sup>1</sup> Ecc. iii. 11.<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxlii. 5; cl. 2.<sup>3</sup> Ps. v. 3; lxxiii. 1.

household to the temptations and barrenness of drowsy prayers argues a forgetfulness of our spiritual responsibilities.

One practical consequence seems naturally to follow from the component parts of the subjects that have passed before us. And this we cannot better state, than in the words of Mr. Howe, well assured that the terseness of the quotation will form a sufficient apology for its length. ‘ We should look upon family religion,’ remarks this valuable writer, ‘ not merely under the notion of a duty, and as imposed ; but as a privilege, and a singular vouchsafement of grace, that there may be such a thing ; that God will be invocated, or even mentioned, in the families of such wretched creatures as we are. Look upon it as a marvellous vouchsafement of grace. Nothing can be more opprobrious to us not to think so,

when God doth so far vouchsafe to set his tabernacle with men on earth. ‘Every tabernacle of yours shall be my tabernacle. If you consent, if you do not shut me out, you shall nowhere have a tabernacle, but what shall be mine. I, the high and lofty One, that inhabit eternity, am content to cohabit with you, and to have your house for my sanctuary.’ What a vouchsafement is this ! and how opprobrious a thing not to count it so !

•‘It hath been accounted so, even in the very Pagan world. A Divine presence—a Deity at hand and ready—how great a privilege hath it been reckoned ! In the dark and dismal days of Popery, when that hath been *regnant*, what a terrible thing hath it been accounted to excommunicate a nation ; to put it under an interdict, that there should be no religion in that nation ! Our

own records tell us, how such a thing hath been understood and resented in this land in former days. Cæsar tells us, that the ancient Gauls did reckon no more terrible punishment could be put upon them, than to be interdicted the sacrifices.<sup>1</sup>

‘ What if, instead of being bidden to pray in our families, we should be forbidden to pray in them ? Make but that fearful supposition, to see how it will relish with you. Suppose there should be a particular interdict upon your house. Suppose by some special signification of the mind of God from heaven, it should be said—‘ I will allow all the neighbouring houses to call upon me ; but I will have no worship out of your house. Let all the rest in the street worship me, and I will hear and accept them ; but from your house I will accept no sacri-

<sup>1</sup> Cæsar de Bello Gallico, lib. vi. 13.

fiice, I will hear no prayer.' What a terrible doom were this ! What a dark and horrid cloud would be drawn over that habitation, if it should be said—' Here shall be no prayer ; here shall be no mention of the name of the Lord.' So that, as in a like case represented to us in reference to the people of the Jews, the poor forlorn members of that family should say—" We may not make mention of the name of the Lord." <sup>1</sup> What a dismal thing were this ! Labour but to get your souls possessed with the apprehension, that the liberty of family worship is a great privilege. And let that be forelaid in your minds, when you come to determine with yourselves about the frequency, how often we shall solace ourselves with this gracious vouchsafement of God

<sup>1</sup> Amos vi. 10.

from heaven unto us. Then it will be no hard thing to determine.’<sup>1</sup>

That hindrances exist to the ready and Christian exercise of this “reasonable service,”<sup>2</sup> is one among the many proofs of man’s total alienation from his God. Every natural man is a practical atheist. “God is not in all his thoughts.”<sup>3</sup> He lives for his own ends, as if there was no God; and the sincere wish of his heart, if he dared to bring it out to the light, is, that there were “no God.”<sup>4</sup> It is not that he is merely disaffected to God, but the very principle of his nature “is enmity.”<sup>5</sup> In the *active* energy of this spirit, it cannot be a matter of surprise, that the daily acknowledgment of dependence and allegiance should be intolerable. So revolting an acknowledgment,

<sup>1</sup> Works, v. pp. 413, 414, slightly abridged.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xii. 1.    <sup>3</sup> Ps. x. 4.    <sup>4</sup> Ps. xiv. 1.    <sup>5</sup> Rom. viii. 7.

giving him pain at every turn, he would not willingly make a part and parcel of the routine of the day. Add to which—even when the native enmity is under subjection to the power of conscience, the slavery of public opinion is a massive chain. Let it not be too hastily supposed, that the emancipation of the slave is fully accomplished. How vast the multitude yet enchained by the good opinion or the frowns of the world around them! Many marks of “the iron that entered into the soul,” remain for a long season after the captive appears to have gained his freedom. The man of external decorum condemns the ungodliness of the world; nay, he has himself relinquished many of its practices, which he formerly allowed. Yet he dares not brave its ridicule by the open acknowledgment of a reasonable and Christian obligation. He

cannot meet the surprise, perhaps also the curiosity, occasioned by commencing a new course, even under the plain and irresistible dictates of his conscience. And thus his cowardice of principle deprives his family of the very badge of a Christian profession, and of a valuable means of grace. And what is far more awful to contemplate, his soul is bound under the guilt of unbelief, and his eternal state foreboded in the sure light of the word of God with "*the fearful and unbelieving*, who shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."<sup>1</sup> Would that those who shrink back from duty in compliment to the ungodly,—who from the dread of shame will deny the service and cross of their Saviour,—would that they did but reflect what will be their position at the great day : not be-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xxi. 8.

fore their family only ; but before the assembled world—how justly overwhelmed with merited disgrace ! “ Of these shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of the Father, with His holy angels.”<sup>1</sup> Oh, what a feather is the highest displeasure of man, compared with the infinite, eternal, intolerable weight of wrath, involved in the sentence of being disowned by Christ at that day !

Some, however, have so far gained an indecisive victory, as to admit the worship of God to form a part of their *ordinary* family routine. Yet the occasion of a friend, to whom this service would be new, uncongenial, or revolting, is a pretext for its omission, as being not a necessary or indispensable obligation ; not, therefore, to be dragged in as a matter of needless offence.

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 38.

Now, if every one in the house is not as nothing in the presence of God, it is abundantly manifest, that He is not in His proper place ; that He does not receive His due, because not His supreme, honour. This friend has come in the order of His providence, and with a far more important intent, than meets the superficial, unthinking eye. He has come into the regular course of family arrangement, to give an opportunity of confessing Christ before men. His coming, therefore, is the touch-stone of sound principles, perhaps, in the midst of a plausible profession, to prove whether Christ shall be " confessed or denied before men." <sup>1</sup> The latter decision, alas ! too often proves the fact, that we fear man more than God ; an exhibition contrary to the spirit of a servant of God, and creating a strong sus-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 32, 33.

picion as to the genuine sincerity of the profession. Thus does the concealment or compromise of our high principles paralyze our Christian usefulness.

It may be, also, that the disinclination of some member of the family produces some hesitation in the course ; yet surely not such as should be indulged, or as could justify the head of the household in yielding to this unhappy and guilty disposition. His responsibility is a firm and decided profession of his own principles in the assurance from the mouth of God—"Them that honour me I will honour."<sup>1</sup>

After all, however, that has been said upon this obligation, it may startle some of our readers to hear us remark upon *the inconsistency of family worship*. We do not hesitate to affirm, that in *some* cases it is

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. ii. 30.

the only *inconsistent practice* in the family; a practice, we mean, marked by its utter want of conformity to, nay, the absolute contrariety with, the general habits of the house. For what else can be said of the fact; that, apart from the custom of assembling the family, perhaps, even twice in the day, there often is nothing in the course of the various individuals of the household, but what indicates the most entire and systematic worldliness, the most complete forgetfulness of God and of eternity, the most *consistent* exhibition of a life according to the fashion of a vain and sinful world? It is somewhat difficult to conceive the inducement to endure the drudgery of this formal service; except it be, as we before hinted, traditionary observance, the recommendation of some influential friend, the standard of decent respectability in the

sphere around them, or possibly one of the many ways of propitiating conscience, devised by those who are building upon no better righteousness than their own.

The true influence is, when it forms a part of a consistent whole; when practice illustrates and confirms profession; when we live as we pray. This commends our religion, not as a notion of sentimentalism or form, but as reality, privilege, holiness; as something that is not only practicable, but delightful. And most valuable is this influence both on him that conducts the worship, and on those that unite in it. The practical remembrance of family responsibility operates most beneficially on the head, in promoting a recollected and circumspect profession. Suppose him to realize his sacred responsibilities, as the priest of his household, and the mouth of

his family to God ; surely he cannot walk in the unseemly spirit of lightness or an unspiritual tone of intercourse. When about to present the several members of his family, his wife, children, household, before God ; will he not be constrained to live before them in the habitual exercise of his practical obligations ? His open confession of his own sins before his Father's mercy-seat, will surely operate to check, in some measure, their gross and lawless influence. For how revolting will be the exhibition of religion, if what has been solemnly expressed in this holy service be not fully carried out in the moulding of the heart and conduct throughout the day ! It is indeed well for him to remember, how deeply the impressive or barren influence of the worship is connected with the manifest sincerity or hypocrisy of his own profession. ' If,' as Mr.

Cecil wisely remarks, ' his children do not see his prayers exemplified in his temper and manners, they will be disgusted with religion.' But let him walk before them, so that they may " take knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus ;"<sup>1</sup> let him evidently come forth to them from the atmosphere of communion with God ; let him manifestly represent God before them in His holiness and love ; and how reverential will be the unity of spirit, and how entire the sympathy of heart, with which they will make his prayers their own !

Not less responsible is the obligation of those who join in this holy service. Do not they stand engaged to set out in all the detail of their daily profession those graces and heavenly exercises, which have formed the matter of their united supplication ?

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 13.

‘ We are really,’ as Philip Henry used to say, ‘ what we are *relatively*.’ The family sphere, in its diversified trials and duties, furnishes a deep, probing, and enlarged test for the discrimination of genuine and spiritual godliness. Social exercises of devotion, scarcely less than personal, are the free development of spiritual religion, a satisfactory test that it has found a home with us, that its influence is pervading our whole sphere. The want of the influence of family prayer shows, not the unfruitfulness of the ordinance, but the heartless and unspiritual tone of the worshippers. Real communion with God will make our faces shine before men. The external form of this privilege is the letter only, wholly destitute of vivifying principle ; nay, deadening, self-satisfying, deluding.

Considering, then, the high obligation of

this sacred exercise, and the inestimable blessings connected with it ; its neglect, or heartless performance, marks a want of completeness of the Christian character, and straitens the flow of many a fertilizing stream of Divine mercy into the soul. But when we trace this neglect to its fountain-source—the alienation of the heart from God, can we wonder that his word, as the organ of his mind, should imprecate the “*outpouring of His fury upon the heathen that know Him not, and upon the families that call not on his name ?*”<sup>1</sup> Prayerless families are here stamped with a heathen name, as living without God, without any regard to his service. Christian they may be in name, but heathen they are in practice ; and assuredly over them hangs a black cloud of Divine vengeance, which will, when

<sup>1</sup> Jer. x. 25.

the Lord's time of forbearance is gone, empty itself upon their heads, and that—not in small drops of anger, but in the *outpouring of fury*, anger in its fervour and abundance. Connected with this rebellion against God is the casting off the primary obligations to our own flesh. For if he be “worse than an infidel” who provideth not his own<sup>1</sup> in temporals, what less can he be, who neglects the spiritual provision for his household? In the same proportion as the soul is infinitely more precious than the body, does the obligation rise to provide for its wants, and the sin heightens in aggravation of neglecting this provision. To starve our family, for whom we are bound to care, surely involves the guilt of murder. Yet how little comparison can be instituted between the injury or the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. v. 8.

murder of the body, when set against the responsibility of bringing their spiritual interests to ruin! On this account we cannot but accord with the judgment of Archbishop Tillotson, given in one of his last practical treatises, that 'constant family worship is so necessary to keep alive a sense of God and religion in the minds of men, that it does not appear how any family that neglects it can in reason be esteemed a family of Christians, or indeed to have any religion at all.'<sup>1</sup>

A Christian therefore would always lay it down as a rule, that where he has a house, God shall have a church in it. The best piece of household furniture, in his estimation, is the altar for the morning and evening worship of God. And if his house was not thus "sanctified" by the word of God and

<sup>1</sup> Works, vol. iii. p. 422, 8vo. 1742.

by prayer, he would count it, as if it were roofless and uncovered, unsafe to live in.

The neglect of this service is no doubtful test of the want of vital and personal godliness. It is no uncharitable judgment to conceive, that those have no care for their own souls, who show none for the souls committed to their trust. Who of us could taste the real enjoyment of communion with our God, and not labour to bring our family into the possession of the same privilege? Could we find so rich a treasure for ourselves, and not seek to make those partakers of our joy, whose souls are as precious as our own, who need Christ and heaven as ourselves, and for whose eternal interests, brought by the good providence of God under our care, we are put in trust? When the conscience of the careless Head of the family shall be awake to his deep Chris-

tian responsibility, he might well shrink from looking them in the face, in the conscious guilt of his neglected obligations. Is he "dwelling with his wife according to knowledge, and as heirs together of the grace of life,"<sup>1</sup> when he is "restraining prayer before God?" What is he but an unnatural father to his children, if he trains them, by example, in his own way of ignorance and irreligion? "Are these his bowels towards them?" Truly we might add—"Are they not restrained?" Where is his mercy to his servants, when he would instruct them to mind his business, and neglect their own; when he would himself show them, that he owes no more to them than to his cattle, whose bodies are fed and cared for? And what more than this does he for

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 7.

his household? Oh, it is fearful—more than words can tell—thus to heap up daily responsibility, with the daily increasing account of its total neglect! Oh, it involves consequences commensurate with eternity, thus to be laying the foundation for family ungodliness to generations yet unborn; thus to anticipate the prospect of those, who may love and respect him now, meeting him at the great day with eternal hatred and execrations. ‘Had I heard my father or my master pray, had his example instructed me in the ways of heaven, then had I not lived and died an heathen, an alien from God; self-excluded by my own unfitness for heaven and for happiness.’ Who can endure the realized prospect of such a meeting; sinking under the mass of personal guilt; sinking yet more deeply under the weight of those, for whose ruin he

is, in some degree at least, answerable, by the wilful neglect of their salvation ?'

Thus manifestly does the Lord mark the ungodly with the heaviest stroke of His displeasure. But if " His curse is in the house of the wicked," it is not less clear, that " He blesseth the habitation of the just." <sup>1</sup> How does He assure their daily meetings around the family altar with His special promise—" Where two or three meet together in my name, there am I in the midst of them !" <sup>2</sup> How does He engage, that when the Head of the family " commands his children and household after him," that " they *shall* keep the ways of the Lord !" <sup>3</sup> He will not suffer His faithful servants to lose their labours, and to lie down in shame. In the midst of disappointment and painful discouragement, only let them " be sted-

<sup>1</sup> Prov. iii. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xviii. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. xviii. 19.

fast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," and they shall "know, that their labour is not in vain in the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

The endearing character of our God as "the God of *all the families* of Israel,"<sup>2</sup> realizes our domestic relation to Him, and "draws" our hearts and the hearts of our families to Him "with bands of love."<sup>3</sup> In the midst of all our mutual subordination and diversified obligations, here we are made to feel, without losing each his proper place, that "we are all one in Christ Jesus;" that "Christ is all, and in all."<sup>4</sup> We meet around our Father's throne, as members of the one "family of heaven and earth."<sup>5</sup> So far as the influence of this service is maintained, the master's authority is melted

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xxxi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hos. xi. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. iii. 28; Col. iii. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Eph. iii. 15.

down in tenderness, without losing one atom of its just claim to respect.<sup>1</sup> The servants' submission is humility and love ; not the compulsion of a slave, but the acknowledgment of obligation, and the consciousness of reciprocal benefit. The glow of relative affection is maintained in all its healthfulness. The restraint upon the tongue, the temper, and general conduct is mutually cherished and maintained in the hallowed spirit of the family devotion.

Upon the whole, we might well ask the question—"What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it?"<sup>2</sup> Let him do it instantly, thankfully, and in the fear of God. For surely with ineffable delight does "the angel of the Lord encamp round about them that fear him."<sup>3</sup> In such a house the Father shines in love,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> See Deut. xx. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 7.

and dwelleth, as in His temple—"This is my rest : here will I dwell ; for I have desired it."<sup>1</sup> The members of the family begin the day with His song and His service. They look to be with Him and for Him all the day ; to be led by His counsel ; to live for His glory ; and to subordinate all their interests to His great name. They meet again at the close of the day, in humiliation, thankfulness, and the renewed exercise of faith, commending themselves to His care. Nor is it the service of one, but of all. The worship is not that of one only, leading the supplications, but the united desire of all, "with one heart and one mouth glorifying God ;"<sup>2</sup> each with his secret Amen joining in spirit with him that prays.<sup>3</sup> Such families are churches within churches ; temples, wherein the morning

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14.<sup>2</sup> Rom. xv. 6.<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

and evening sacrifice are offered upon "the altar that sanctifieth the gift." And when God is thus worshipped in these family churches, will not the public worship in the assemblies of the saints be conducted with more extended spiritual harmony of supplication? Nay, will there not be a more animating earnest of the worship of the great assembly, where the whole congregation of the redeemed shall be for ever one in the pure and infinitely blessed service of everlasting praise?

THE END.

*L. Seeley,  
Thames Ditton.*



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